Transportation
Land Development
Environmental
Services

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Attendees:	See Attached List	Date/Time:	5/04/00 6:00pm
		Project No.:	50885
Place:	Londonderry Town Offices	Re:	I-93 Salem to Manchester Advisory Task Force Meeting #2
		Notes taken by:	Bruce Tasker

Jeff Brillhart welcomed all the Advisory Task Force (ATF) Members, local officials and public who came to the meeting.

Jeff provided two handouts that identified the project schedule and meeting agenda.
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Jeff indicated that the meeting was to present and discuss a preliminary overview of the rail alternatives that are being looked at as part of the I-93 Corridor EIS.

- Jeff also brought up a request from the Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) to allow the Town of Pelham to join the Advisory Task Force (ATF) with one member. Concern was expressed relative to the fairness of extending membership to one Town and not to others. ATF members felt that further discussion regarding the request was necessary, but Mr. Singlelakis from the NRPC and the representatives from the Town of Pelham were not yet in attendance. This request would be discussed later in order to keep the meeting moving.
- Tom Case of the Rockingham Regional Planning Commission agreed to act as the Chairman of the ATF. (Tom was concerned that he may not be re-appointed to the Commission and would have to step down as Chairman of the ATF. In the meantime however, The ATF members including Tom agreed that he will act as Chairman.)
- Jeff mentioned that Phase 1 of the I-93 project was nearing completion and the Scoping Report, which is the product of Phase 1, will be available by May 22, 2000.
- The next ATF meeting has been scheduled for June 1, 2000 and at that meeting, the concepts developed for the Exits 1 and 2 area in the Town of Salem will be presented for discussion.
- Meetings are also being scheduled with the NH State Police and the State Fire Marshall to discuss incident management strategies for the I-93 corridor.
- Meetings have also taken place between the Departments I-93 consultant and the Town of Londonderry and Derry's Exit 4A-interchange consultant to coordinate both projects and discuss traffic issues.

Tom Case wanted the ATF members to know that wetland impacts in the Town of Salem will be problematic. Workshops are being held between the Town of Salem Conservation Commission and the Rockingham Planning Commission. Tom indicated that a balance between the socio-economic and the environmental impacts need to be achieved to satisfy the environmental concerns.

David Wilcock provided an overview of the rail options in the area.

West Rail Corridor:

- The Nashua Regional Planning Commission has completed a Major Investment Study (MIS) for introducing passenger service to the existing Mainline rail between Lowell, MA and Nashua, NH. Today the rail provides freight service only. The study focused primarily on Lowell to Nashua, an 11-mile section. The NHDOT has received a commitment of $12 M for purchase of equipment to operate the service and $1 M in funding to complete the necessary environmental studies and preliminary engineering. The first 11 miles is an active NHDOT project. The I-93 study is looking at what the benefits would be for the I-93 corridor by extending the proposed passenger service from Nashua to Manchester.

East Rail Corridor:

- The I-93 study is also looking at the abandoned Manchester – Lawrence (M&L) east rail corridor (27 miles), which connects in Lawrence, MA with the Haverhill MBTA Line which, connects to downtown Boston. The M&L line passes through Salem, Windham, Derry, Londonderry and Manchester. In Manchester, the M&L line was severed by the recent extension of the Manchester Airport Runway. Additional constraints or short comings on the M&L corridor include approximately 50 at grade crossings (safety issues) if the line was reactivated, and the fact that passengers to and from New Hampshire would need to transfer (ie, change trains) in Lawrence, making service less convenient. Approximately 10 miles south of the Lawrence Station the track is reduced from two tracks to one track. There are 22 trains to Haverhill today, and if through service was extended from Lawrence, MA to Manchester, then fewer trains would service the Haverhill station.

I-93 Rail Corridor:

Dave then provided an overview of the regulatory, operational, market service, and technological issues to be considered in assessing the feasibility of a rail system within the I-93 corridor between the State Line and Exit 5. His presentation included the following:

- General summary of the characteristics of possible modes – traditional commuter rail, diesel multiple units, traditional light rail (over head power), Monorail and diesel light rail. (Monorail is not realistic because of the high cost (approx. $95 M/mile.)) Given the horizontal and vertical alignment of I-93, the light rail diesel would appear to be the preference although new technology may change that recommendation.
- General infrastructure requirements for each mode and typical unit costs.
- Regulatory issues regarding FRA/FTA jurisdiction/oversight.
- Operating issues
  - Frequency of service helps dictate infrastructure requirements. Less frequent service (20 minute or greater headways) probably only requires a single-track main line with strategically located passing sidings.
  - More frequent service (20 minute or less headway) probably requires two main line tracks.
- The minimum desirable footprint for rail (as depicted on various typical sections)

- With 2 tracks or passing siding the desirable footprint is 61 feet (closed drainage) or 87 feet (open drainage).
- The desirable footprint includes the track structure, all railroad system related equipment signals, catenary poles, etc.), and access for maintenance. It is possible to reduce the footprint to approximately 50 feet where the train is located on structure.
- Light rail can operate at speeds up to 60mph max
- Max grade for light rail between stations is 4%; and in station areas 0.5%
- Pedestrian bridge or underpass will be required to connect parking areas with stations

ALIGNMENT OPTIONS

- Look at I-93 highway corridor from Exit 5 to the state line. Preference would be to keep the rail in the I-93 median to eliminate complications at the highway interchanges, and minimize property impacts along I-93.
- Look at combination of the M&L and I-93 corridors.

STATION OPPORTUNITIES

EXIT 1 Exit 1 options are limited to the west side of I-93 because the rail needs to be on the west side of I-93 because the median is very narrow south of Exit 1 and the constraints of the Exit 1 infrastructure and surrounding development. A potential station site is not being suggested in the Exit 1 area.

EXIT 2 The current thinking would provide a station in the median just south of the Exit 2 interchange, with a park and ride lot located on the east side of I-93. Existing development makes this (and any other site) difficult.

EXIT 3 The current thinking would provide a station in the wide median just south of the Exit 3 interchange, with a park and ride lot also located in the median area.

EXIT 4 The current thinking would provide a station in the median just north of the Exit 4 interchange, with a park and ride lot connected to the existing park and ride facility.

EXIT 5 There are two potential locations. Both locations are west of Exit 5. The first site is located to the south of the interchange. Access would be via an extension of an existing street. The second site is located north of NH 28 on a developed parcel in the NW quadrant of the diamond interchange.

MANCHESTER AIRPORT

The northern terminus would appear to be the Manchester Airport via the abandoned M&L line from Exit 5. (The West Rail Corridor could provide rail access between Manchester and points South.) Such a connection would serve the Airport and surrounding market area.

EXTEND NH I-93 RAIL CORRIDOR ALONG I-93 WITHIN MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts is now constructing a Woburn Transfer Center at the interchange of I-93 and I-95 in Woburn. The center would provide, commuter rail stop, an intercity rail service stop from Portland, Maine to Boston, MA. Express Bus service to Logan Airport, local bus service and a

2800 car parking facility. It may make sense to look at connecting this light rail option to the Woburn Center. If you look at the amount of employment that occurs along the I-93 corridor, (for example the River Road park area employs approximately 6000 people, with 30% from NH) the rail could also provide opportunities to access the employment centers (15 major employers in corridor) along I-93 between NH and Massachusetts. The evaluation of the infrastructure for the rail system from the state line south is not part of this project, however, potential ridership to Boston and Woburn on the south and Manchester Airport to the north is being considered.

Questions:

Maureen Rose. Would the rail system be capable of providing sufficient capacity?

Dave Wilcock. We will be looking at ridership projections and developing conceptual layouts for the system, station and the park and ride lots. However, a two track, light rail system as we are considering for planning purposes with the typical train using 3 cars, each carrying 80 passengers , could carry 240 passengers. If there were 30 trains that would be 7,200 passengers.

Jeff. This project is primarily concerned with improvements to I-93 and is not a study to bring rail to Manchester. However, it is prudent that consideration be given to what might be needed to accommodate future rail options. The Department is looking at three rail options. A westerly corridor (currently provides freight services only) is being evaluated by the Department for passenger rail opportunities from Lowell to Nashua and Merrimack and perhaps to Manchester. This is actually a separate project independent of the I-93 study. The Department is optimistic about the possibility for future passenger rail services from Manchester to Nashua to Lowell to Boston. A second existing rail corridor being evaluated is east of I-93, and connects Manchester, Derry, and Salem to Lawrence and Boston. The corridor is not active, portions of this corridor have been sold, and the existing infrastructure is generally unacceptable. Reactivating this corridor will be extremely difficult. The third option involves providing rail within the I-93 corridor. The Department proposes to improve I-93 but do so, so as to not preclude the possibility of future rail service in the highway corridor. Because the west rail line might provide better opportunities for linkage to Manchester, the I-93 rail option may possibly end at Exit 5 or at the Airport. The Department is not considering building the rail as part of this I-93 widening project. Deciding which rail corridor would best serve the area and working out the details for rail service will require some future rail study to be completed.

Bruce Thomas commented that the idea to develop rail opportunities in NH is a good one, but we need to fix the highway and leave the rail for another day.

Peter Griffin, President of NH Railroad Revitalization Association, explained that his organization is an advocacy group to promote railroads in NH and in the northeast. He commended the NHDOT for factoring in the discussion of rail as part of the I-93 project. He noted that other rail initiatives under consideration involving NH include extending the Newburyport to Boston line up to Portsmouth and perhaps Maine; opening passenger service from Portland, Maine to Boston, and extending service from Haverhill, MA to Plaistow and perhaps Newton and Exeter. He also noted that given the growth in the area served by I-93 that rail has to be a serious consideration to address the long term economic needs of the area. He went on to explain that the question of locating the rail along I-93 or through the downtown

area is an important consideration. There are pro and cons for both. The Town of Dover has been wrestling with that question when trying to locate the Dover station downtown as part of the Portland to Boston project. Dover wants to use that station as a means to keep growth centralized in the downtown. Rutland, Vermont is doing the same thing. They have reconfigured their downtown rail network to be a welcome center into the downtown.

He also explained that the West Rail Corridor project should rightfully be the State's first priority. This corridor has the population base, and the existing infrastructure. He also commented that relative to evaluating rail options, consideration needs to be to freight opportunities and not just providing passenger service. The area served by I-93 has an industrial base that rail might well serve.

Jim Turse. Has the Department considered the possibility of a joint public/private partnership with regard to bringing rail into the area served by I-93?

Jeff. The Department is not at this time actively pursuing this idea. The need or desire for rail is not so apparent at this time that the Department foresees actually building a rail line as part of improving I-93. However, the Department is aware that such partnerships have been successful in other parts of the country and VHB has suggested that the I-93 corridor has possibilities. In other places in the country, private companies have built the rail infrastructure and run the system for a period of time, before turning the system over to the State. So if the Department was able to not preclude rail service down the I-93 corridor and development continues along that corridor like it has for the last 10 years, I would say there may be an opportunity for some private company to come to the table and propose a partnership.

Jim Turse. Joint development opportunities need to be looked at as part of the equation to offset some of your cost to construct and operate by allowing joint development opportunities along the corridor. I'm working in the Exit 2 area in Salem and while River Road in Andover might have 6000 employees easily in that area, I think we come very close to that number here at Exit 2. There is the potential for 1,000,000 SF of additional development, which is an additional 2,500 to 2,800 employees. That is the kind of joint development opportunities that can be enhanced by coupling it with rail as part of a development master plan. It addresses the question of do you develop your master planning towards your downtown or do you look at the interstate corridor and determine how that can be encouraged to grow. This needs to part be of an overall economic development plan, and not just a transportation plan.

Roberte Robie. I see the rail system in the Nashua area and on the seacoast as a reality, I think there is a great deal of political will for those projects and the funding will probably be there. However, by the time those two projects are finished the political will and especially the funding for the rail corridor on I-93 will not be there. My greatest concern is combining the rail service, as part of the widening of I-93. I think it is going to cloud the widening of I-93, and I-93 will be delayed. I think it is a wonderful idea, but I do not see it happening in the near future, and I do not want to see it become a deterrent for the widening of I-93.

Derry Resident. Relative to putting the rail service in the median, will an accident-involving rail completely tie up I-93 and shut it down?

Dave Wilcock. There are other places in the country where rail service in the median has been done and it has not been a major problem. There always is the possibility of a catastrophic accident that would tie up the highway, but measures will be taken to reduce the possibility of such an event.

Derry Resident. All of the rail options have many issues. Do all of these issues have to be resolved before we get started on the line?

Jeff. The idea is to not preclude the possibility of rail. This project is not intended to build the rail. It could be built in the future; it will not be cheap, there will be environmental problems, there be other concerns, but it could be done. When the time comes that a rail system is necessary, then a study would be done that would identify where the rail should be constructed, in the I-93 corridor, the existing Manchester/Lawrence corridor, or some place else. This project is not going to answer these questions. The Department is trying to layout a right-of-way so that we will have the highway in it, the opportunity for bus service, as well as, rail and other amenities. The obstacles associated with the rail corridor do not have to be resolved before we begin the highway widening.

Maureen Rose. I am an abutter to the old M&L railroad bed as well as I-93, and I am concerned about speed and the noise associated with rail, and the safety to the wildlife. Will the rail electrocute the birds? Do you need to know if a rail will be part of the I-93 project before you start the widening so that you'll know how wide the footprint needs to be for the highway. How wide do you need to expand the highway for the rail, and how much of the right-of -way do you need? Do these questions need to be answered first, or could you work within the existing footprint and maybe take away a I-93 lane for the rail, because the rail will reduce some of the traffic on I-93.

Dave Wilcock. The train will operate at about 40 to 60 mph for light rail vehicles in the I-93 corridor. In the M&L corridor the train would probably operate in the 40 to 50 mph range. As far as wildlife is concerned, this type of system has been around since the turn of the century, and there would be no issue as far as electrocution is concerned. Animals would have to cross a wider section of right-of-way with the rail system, but fencing would reduce the crossing conflicts or redirect the animals to a safer crossing point. As far as the width of the right-of-way required, at this time we are evaluating the maximum width that might possibly be developed given national design criteria. There will be areas along the existing I-93 corridor that can accommodate both the rail and highway footprint with no additional width and there are other areas that will require additional right of way and modifications to the existing I-93 layout.

Maureen Rose. I just want to know if the improvements are going to be in my backyard or a little further away, or should I sell my house?

Jeff. At this time, the Department would prefer to buy the right-of-way so that the layout eventually proposed could accommodate infrastructure needs for the immediate and foreseeable long term needs of the State's transportation system. Exactly what additional right-of-way will be required has not been determined as of yet. At future meetings, we will have more detail to identify what additional right-of-way will be proposed.

Dave Wilcock. From a noise point of view, electric trains are very quiet and diesel locomotives are like a truck going by your house. The wheel to rail interaction is a lot quieter than it use to be, because today's rail uses a continuous welded rail instead of the jointed rail every 39 feet where you would hear the clickity clack. Most of the horizontal geometry for the rail line is relatively straight. The places where there is tight curvature (such as at the state line, near at Exit 1, and again at Exit 5) are the areas where you can hear rail noise, which is the metal against the metal. The time when train service begins and ends is dependent upon the demand, fully operational systems today are generally running between 5:00AM and 10:30PM.

Comment. At the first meeting, the Department mentioned that this highway is going to have a life span, of say 30 years. People need to understand that when in 30 years the highway is full, it will be important that we have room for a rail option. I think it might help clarify and gain understanding for everyone in the public to show that you have a planned life cycle for this highway when it gets to that point.

Jeff. Nationwide we are reaching the maximum width to which highways can be expanded. Once this highway is widened it would appear to be very unlikely it will be widened again in the future. That is another reason for planning for the possibility of this rail corridor.

Comment. The Department's proposals for addressing I-93 for the long term are appropriate, but the Department also needs to address what near term measures can be taken to minimize the affects the construction will have on traffic. If Route 3 in Massachusetts is widened at the same time, transportation in NH will be at a standstill.

Tom Case. Relative to reviving the abandoned M&L line, there are a lot of homes along the corridor, and the corridor is used for walking trails. The alternative for reactivating this corridor will probably be eliminated very quickly because of the current corridor use today.

Comment. Is the I-93 rail corridor being set up for passenger service only?

Jeff. At this time, the Department is thinking that the I-93 Rail Corridor will be used for passenger service only due to the existing I-93 geometry limitations. The M&L line, however could be a freight line or passenger line, or perhaps both. Exactly what happens will be part of the debate that will happen in the future when somebody says we have the money to do one of these rail lines which one do we do.